

# A genuinely progressive foreign policy

by David Waring

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Five key changes are required to transform Britain's tarnished relationship with the world and make our foreign policy genuinely progressive.

## 1 Unilateral nuclear disarmament

In the wake of the financial crisis there's been an increased willingness to dismantle some of the tired old assumptions inherited from the 1980s. Few clichés from the Thatcher era are more richly deserving of consignment to the dustbin of history than the idea that retaining our 'independent nuclear deterrent' is the litmus test of hard-headed realism. After all:

- The government cannot so much as name the enemy that the deterrent is supposed to deter;
- Britain's 'independent' nuclear capability in fact renders us heavily reliant on US management and technology;
- Far from making us safer, the insistence on retaining Trident only increases the chances that other states will seek their own capabilities, which obviously jeopardises international security. The threat of any sort of international nuclear exchange, whether intended or accidental, is no joke; and
- The idea that we should maintain this sort of massive and indiscriminate destructive power because it affords us greater influence on the world stage is little short of obscene.
- It's time Britain joined the vast majority of the world's nations and become a non-nuclear state. The cost savings would be merely an added bonus.

## 2 A serious approach to climate change

For progressive people, the facts on climate change have long been understood. It will take a 40% cut in emissions levels on 1990 levels by 2020 merely to give the planet a fighting chance of averting the 2-degree rise in global temperature that will cause catastrophes across the developing world whose effects will be felt everywhere.

In addition to these emissions cuts, those nations that have contributed most to causing global warming – like Britain – have a clear, historic obligation to give developing countries the aid required to deal with its effects. These are the strict criteria by which any defensible UK climate policy must be judged.

## 3 An end to aggression and occupation

It is Britain's policy towards Western Asia that has brought the country's reputation into the deepest disrepute under New Labour. But the shame of Iraq and our supporting Israel's bombardment of Lebanon needs to be seen in a broader context.

Decades of interference in the affairs of the world's primary energy-producing region have served only to exacerbate conflict, nurture tyranny, retard societal development and internationalise insecurity.

Here more than anywhere else, it is time to make a decisive break with Washington.

A progressive British government would not invade and occupy countries on the other side of the world, arm an aggressive and expansionist Israel, or cosy up to the various Middle Eastern tyrannies.

## 4 Withdrawal of arms trade support

In a country that claims to have learnt from the wisdom of Adam Smith, the quasi-mercantilist coddling of the British arms industry by the nanny state seems incongruous to say the least.

The questionable efficiency and value for money gained from supporting the industry

is significant enough at a time of economic hardship. But beyond this, the fact that government controls fail to prevent our exports from falling into the hands of known human rights abusers renders the practice fundamentally at odds with basic human values.

A genuinely progressive government would transfer the public resources used to prop up the arms dealers into research and development for green technology.

## 5 Reining in the financial sector

If progressives are interested in making Britain a decent and responsible citizen of the world, then we cannot forget that the recession born on Wall Street and in the City of London had repercussions right across the globe.

International trade shrivelled as credit flows seized up, firms went bust, people lost their jobs and demand plummeted.

Britain's policy of laissez-faire financial regulation has decidedly international consequences. It is in the world's interests as well as our own that this failed economic model is read its last rites, and replaced with a way of doing business that does not pose a living, systemic risk to the global economy.

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Let me say that I do not for a moment expect Labour or any other party to adopt these policies of their own volition.

Progressive victories in politics have always been won by popular struggle from below, never as gifts handed down voluntarily from above.

If these are the policies that progressive people across the left want to see enacted, then the only way to make that happen is to organise and make our voices heard.

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